


Chapter 6

Here's Where The Story Ends: Scenes From the End of a Teaching Career

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a first-person narrative chronicling the final months of a professor's career at a small liberal arts college that abruptly announced its closure. Blending memoir, reflection, and institutional critique, the chapter explores the emotional toll of academic precarity, the loss of professional identity, and the quiet resilience required to teach through uncertainty. It offers a ground-level perspective on higher education's systemic fragility, foregrounding lived experience over abstraction. While personal in tone, the piece invites broader questions about faculty labor, administrative decision-making, and what remains when a career ends not by choice, but by collapse.

THE INTERVIEW

March 2005. I take the Amtrak train from New York City north to Albany, NY to interview for a teaching job.

I had been *on the market*, as we academics say, for a couple years, and had a couple bites, but this was my first campus visit. I wore a suit and a long coat, hat and scarf and gloves—it was March, sure, but I was going upstate, after all, and I'd heard it got really cold. It was 45 degrees out and people were wearing t-shirts and

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shorts. I must have looked like some cast member of *Dr. Zhivago* walking around the campus.

It was an all-day thing: interview with the provost, then the dean, a reading, a class visit with a Q&A, then lunch with the department, then the search committee, then dinner, then the train home. It was exhausting but also terribly exciting—just the prospect of joining a faculty and having colleagues and students.

What I remember most is the train ride home, listening to Cocteau Twins on my iPod and welling up. I knew I had nailed the interview. I knew I was going to get the job. It felt really, really strange to be so confident about that. But it would also mean my wife and I would have to uproot our lives and say goodbye to New York City and take a chance on something new.

Gradually, Then Suddenly

Nineteen years later, a former student sent along an X post/Tweet from the *Times Union*, the local paper of record, leaking the news that the board of trustees at The College of Saint Rose, the 102-year-old institution where I was a tenured full professor, had voted to close operations after the spring semester.

The next day, I drove to campus for what was described as a “town hall.” Everyone already knew what the president and the board were announcing. I don’t work in crisis management or institutional messaging or even educational administration, so take this observation for what it’s worth, but if there is going to be a board vote whether or not to close down an institution, it might be a decent idea to have emails reflecting possible results saved in drafts, ready to send out as soon as the decision is reached. But what do I know?

It had been years since I’d seen the campus so jam-packed. Police cars and crowds filled the road in front of the president’s office. Spread out across the lawns were cops and news vans with satellite dishes. Reporters stood in front of cameras, pre-recording reports and interviewing students. It all took place inside the arts and music building, the fanciest building on campus, built for what were then the most popular programs, but that had since been discontinued.

The hall was full. I stood outside in the overflow area, an empty art gallery, with disembodied voices piped into the hallway. A retired colleague, whom I hadn’t seen in years, a child of the ‘60s who called for a wildcat strike for a raise every time the college laid people off, held the door open to the cold outdoors, as if to expose what was going on.

This was, verbatim, the same announcement that had already been emailed and posted on the college’s website, every word indifferent to the kids outside on the frost-covered grass.

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